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Elana J. Scraba

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SCHOOLS TEACH – PARENTS & COMMUNITIES SUPPORT – CHILDREN LEARN – EVERYONE BENEFITS

A Review of
The New Brunswick Education System
Anglophone Sector

Advice to
Dr. Dennis J. Furlong, NB Minister of Education
April 24, 2002

Education Consulting International
Elana J. Scraba
14358 Park Drive
Edmonton, Alberta
T5R 5V2

Phone: (780) 484-7475
e-mail: elana@shaw.ca

103-02488/

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Executive Summary

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Schools Teach—Parents & Communities Support—Children Learn—Everyone Benefits

Executive Summary

Background

New Brunswick and Alberta students' performance on national and international assessments served as a catalyst for this study.

The Study

The study compares factors educators believed affected the performance of Alberta and New Brunswick students on the most recent OECD/PISA assessment of reading (math and science).

It compares key documents and legislation from the two provinces.

Alberta

The twenty Alberta educators interviewed provide a consistent view of an education system that supports complex literacy.

The interviewees' unanimous observations describe an education system with strong alignment of all components, in a culture that values learning and has high expectations.

It is a system with high standards coherently focussed on excellence in teaching and learning for all students supported by the public and parents.

New Brunswick

The education system New Brunswick educators describe is the opposite of Alberta's. They describe a system in crisis despite the dedication and efforts of the professionals in the system.

They describe a closed system with low expectations and no defined standards reeling after years of constant change on all fronts.

Schools manage despite the difficult conditions, and there are many innovative projects that are successful in supporting children's learning. However, the system as a whole is not coherent, and there is no systemic culture of or support for learning.

Conclusions

Learning Culture

Document analysis and interview data confirm that Alberta's education system is based on a Learning Culture. All efforts of educators and parents in support of schools focus on maximizing the learning of **all** students.

The Alberta system has dealt with as much change as has New Brunswick's. It has had inclusionary education since the mid-1980's. It has many small rural schools miles and miles from anywhere. Its city schools deal with difficult education problems—large numbers of English as a second language learners, poverty, crime, unsupported children, parents who don't speak English. Its rural schools deal with many of the same issues. Schools have experienced deep cuts to spending. Yet, children learn.

A major difference between the two systems is the mandated French language programming in New Brunswick. However, if the research on language acquisition is to be believed, that should be a benefit to New Brunswick students.

The study concludes that there are complex systemic issues needing attention in the New Brunswick education.

There are no simple or singular solutions. Finding solutions will require courage, time, commitment, and mobilizing the entire province to develop a true Learning Culture. Resolving issues will require people to set aside previously held ideas and to compromise in the interest of **all children's learning**.

Recommendations

The report recommends to the minister that he

- Develop a culture of learning & achievement
- Communicate effectively & involve the community
- Plan for change & stabilize the system
- Develop an accountable education system
- Address structural & systemic problems over time

Introduction

Impetus for Change

New Brunswick students' performance on the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2000 Reading assessment is a wake-up call for the province. The PISA results show that the New Brunswick education system is not meeting the learning needs of students, and that it fails most dramatically at the extremes on the achievement spectrum—performance below level one, the lowest category, and performance at level five—the highest.

French Immersion data typically show that senior immersion students out-perform their English-only counterparts in language-based activities such as reading. New Brunswick has a large percentage of students in French Immersion; consequently, one could expect proportionately large numbers of students in the top-scoring group. Not so. The PISA data suggest that the French Immersion programme is not preparing New Brunswick's students for the complex contemporary world.

New Brunswick has no fewer capable young people than any place else in Canada. New Brunswick has a dedicated, professional, well-trained teaching force, and a long history of educational leadership. Its schools face similar challenges to those faced by schools across Canada, but not greater ones.

With its commitment to educating a bi-lingual populace and its tradition of intellectual leadership and scholarship, New Brunswick has potential to have superbly well-educated students. This will happen only with significant shifts in the larger community's beliefs about and commitment to learning. It will happen only with carefully planned changes to the education system.

We are obliged to educate all of the children entrusted to us to the maximum of their potential. That is the primary responsibility placed on governments and the education systems of modern democracies.

The New Brunswick government and education system must focus efforts and resources over the next many years to remedy the current situation and fulfill that responsibility.

The Alberta Study

Summary of the Alberta Interviews

- Consistent Responses
- The PISA Cohort
- The Themes
  - **Theme One**: Strong alignment—Curriculum, Resources, Assessment
  - **Theme Two**: Cooperation, Commitment & Professionalism
  - **Theme Three**: Culture of High Expectations
  - **Theme Four**: Strong Assessment and Examination Programs
  - **Theme Five**: Excellent Curriculum & Strong Teaching
  - **Theme Six**: Strong Professional, Stable Leadership
  - **Theme Seven**: Balanced Approach to Teaching Reading & to the Self-Esteem Movement
  - **Theme Eight**: Coherent Planning Based on Systematic Results Reporting
  - **Theme Nine**: High Standards
  - **Theme Ten**: Parent & Community Support and Involvement

Summary of The Alberta Interviews

The Alberta interviewees included people from all sectors involved with education. Most interviews were one-on-one, although those at the ministry were with small groups, and a few were with two people at a time. No one had information about the rest of the interview sample. Each interview had the same organizing question—" *What has Alberta done to foster students' literacy?" The question was expressed in the context of the educational experience of the PISA cohort—children who started school in 1990.*

Consistent Responses

What was interesting about the Alberta interviews was the consistency of response. Without exception, interviewees noted the influence of very strong alignment of curriculum, resources and assessment. Without exception, interviewees noted the positive influence Alberta's testing and results reporting program has on teaching and learning. The third point made by everyone had to do with strong leadership, professionalism and cooperation amongst all sectors in education.

There were other repeated observations that became recurring themes of what people observed as important and effective in the Alberta system—high standards, emphasis on complex reading and writing, the role of libraries, parental involvement.

These interviews present a portrait of an education system that is focussed on students' learning. It is a system that concentrates on practical and effective ways to make the best possible learning for all students happen in a professional and supportive context.

The PISA Cohort

In every interview, there was also a caution. Each person said in one way or another that the PISA cohort benefited from the very best that a system can offer. The PISA cohort began school prior to the deep cuts to education. They benefited from

- a balanced approach to teaching reading
- extended written requirements on grade 3, 6 & 9 achievement tests
- demanding grade 12 English exams that pressure downward for complex reading and writing
- stable but progressive leadership in all sectors of education
- a stable, experienced well-trained teaching force
- stable and very progressive curriculum (1991)
- clearly illustrated standards and expectations
- a society that values education and has high expectations

All interviewees pointed out that the current unrest in the education system in Alberta has the potential to put some of this exemplary practice in jeopardy. All cautioned that sustaining excellence will be a challenge in the years to come.

"Respect for education is an Alberta tradition within which everyone could build. It is now being taken for granted." *Graham Foster, former Supervisor Language Arts, Calgary Roman Catholic School Board.*

"Teachers are the bread and butter of the system. We might be putting that in jeopardy right now. However, what we've built up over the years is very strong – very positive deposits into our bank account." *Hal Kluczny, President, Alberta College of School Superintendents*

The Themes

The discussion that follows highlights nine themes that emerged from the Alberta interviews. Under each theme, I quote the interviewees directly. It is clear from their comments, that the interviewees see a deep commitment to excellence in education in the Alberta system. This has not come easily, but it has been a commitment for at least half a century, perhaps longer.

- Theme One: Strong Alignment of Curriculum, Resources &Assessment
- Theme Two: Cooperation, Commitment & Professionalism
- Theme Three: Culture of High Expectations
- Theme Four: Strong Assessment and Examination Programs
- Theme Five: Excellent Curriculum & Strong Teaching
- Theme Six: Strong Professional, Stable Leadership
- Theme Seven: Balanced Approach to Teaching Reading & the Self-Esteem Movement
- Theme Eight: Coherent Planning Based on Systematic Results Reporting
- Theme Nine: High Standards
- Theme Ten: Parent & Community Support & Involvement

Themes from the Alberta Interviews

Theme One

Strong alignment of Curriculum, Resources & Assessment

"Alignment is very strong – Curriculum – Resources – Assessment." *Gina Vivonne-Vernon, Director Learning and Teaching Resources Branch, Alberta Learning.*

"Alberta, more than any other province has aligned testing to curriculum standards." *Todd Rogers, Director, Centre for Research, Measurement and Evaluation, University of Alberta.*

"Materials are closely aligned. Links between curriculum and assessment and assessment results are explicit. There is teacher involvement in all pieces. Well-trained teachers who know curriculum and assessment. Achievement tests and diploma exams clarify standards and ensure accountability to teach curriculum. Authorized and approved resources widely used." *Gina Vivone-Vernon*

"Communication about the alignment is clear and well understood. There is a constant feedback loop or circle. Everyone knows about these connections." *Jenny Bushrod, Program Manager, Primary Programs & ESL, Curriculum, Alberta Learning.*

"There is a unifying aspect of common curriculum and exams. Kids like to know they are doing the same things as others." *David and Donna Kelly, International Baccalaureates Coordinator and English Department head respectively, Western Canada High School, Calgary*

Theme Two

Cooperation Commitment & Professionalism

"People in Alberta work very closely together." *Gina Vivone-Vernon*

"Connection to post secondary is strong." *Janet Hancock, Program Manager, Language Arts Curriculum, Alberta Learning.*

"Our consultative process gives teachers real ownership of programs, resources, tests and exams." *Bill Talbot, Consultant Senior High English Language Arts Curriculum, Alberta Learning*

"Compliance – commitment – collaboration – cooperation.

"You can't tell people to do something – they have to own it and believe in it. Here, teachers as professionals as well as members of their association have been directly involved in *every* part of the process of *everything*. Teachers help create and direct curriculum, exams, mark exams, set standards. By the time they have to implement, teachers are so involved they comply.

"Cooperation works both ways. Here in practice it works from the bottom up." *Dave Young, former Superintendent, Parkland School District, former President, College of Alberta School Superintendents*

"By the 1990's, the *Alberta Teachers Association* had a very strong orientation to professionalism. They were able to collaborate with government and with *Alberta School Trustees Association* (now the *Alberta School Boards Assoc.*). There was unprecedented true partnership amongst absolutely all stakeholders in education." *Hal Kluczny, President, College of Alberta School Superintendents*

"The *Alberta Teachers' Association Specialist Councils* are very influential – at least as much as *Alberta Learning*. Through conferences and newsletters a surprising amount of professional development occurs." *Ann Hill PhD, Grade one teacher Earl Buxton School, Edmonton Public Schools, expert in Early Childhood Education*

"All sectors in education cooperate and provide focussed leadership to get things done in the interest of students' learning." *Curriculum Branch and Learning Resources Branch staff, Alberta Learning*

Theme Three

Culture of High Expectations

"I believe that Alberta's testing program has created an expectation for achievement by grade 3 and this is sustained." *Jim Brackenbury, Director Learner Assessment Branch, Alberta Learning*

"The key thing in Alberta is cultural. Alberta has a unique culture of expectations." *Dennis Theobold, Alberta Teachers' Association*

"The populace in Alberta is worldly, and from around the world. People have high expectations. There has always been an influx of people – many professionals, but also non-professionals. They all demanded the best education for their kids. Schools responded." *Carol Young, former High school English teacher for Edmonton, Lethbridge, Fort McMurray, and Grande Cache Public Schools, currently a curriculum resource developer for Alberta Learning*

"The accountability culture within schools is deep." *Dianne Oberg, Dean of Elementary Education, University of Alberta*

"Culture in education here is results/achievement orientated. The system works here because people expect this." *Dave Young*

Theme Four

Strong Assessment & Examination Programs

"The Testing program is strong. We have had an external exam program for a long time. I've never lived in an environment that didn't have regular assessment.

"In terms of literacy, maybe the nature of our assessment makes a difference. **Kids have to deal with ideas and have to write. This says something to teachers about the complexity of learning** and process/inquiry/performances that have to on in classrooms.

"People take the assessment seriously. The tests come with guidelines for assessing results in a broad way." *Dianne Oberg*

"The Myths of external exams—teach to the test, align marks to the test, narrow curriculum taught—did not happen with the Alberta Diploma Exam Program (i.e. the Grade 12 credentialing program). In fact, the reverse happened.

"Before standardized tests here, for some freedom meant doing little. Testing makes everyone teach the curriculum and teach well. The exams here have teeth – they count." *David and Donna Kelly*

"Diploma Exams help. They have provided a common language to talk about writing, and they consolidate practice." *Senior high English teachers, Parkland School District, Stony Plain, Alberta*

"The majority view in Alberta is that a strong testing program has had positive impact. The tests are recognized as being reliable, valid, rooted in curriculum, results available and have clout. The curriculum is taught. Exam marking sets standards, keeps kids in focus, develops a sense of reasonable expectation, facilitates exchange of practice for teachers

"The provincial exam marking process is replicated all over the province further embedding understanding of standards, and developing a common language for talking about kids' work.

"The Alberta achievement test and diploma exams drive the sense of what is important in curriculum and what is implemented. Exams make curriculum explicit.

"Without the Alberta assessment program, people relied on very dated poor commercial tests – Gates McGinity Reading, Canadian Test of Basic Skills, etc. People no longer use these low quality, non-curriculum based tests. **Having a major writing test is critical**." *Graham Foster, former Supervisor for Language Arts, Calgary Roman Catholic School Board, now an independent consultant*

"Even with a focused and important assessment program, I haven't seen in Alberta – the couple of months of exam preparation like I saw in the States. Teachers prepare kids for exams – but most teachers believe that if they teach the curriculum, well, their kids will do well on the test." *Dianne Oberg*

"Mark inflation has gone – the pressure on teachers to give kids inappropriately high marks has disappeared." *David Kelly*

"Students' work has always been honoured." *Jim Brackenbury, Director Learner Assessment Branch, Alberta Learning*

"Grade 12 exams and standards tempered grade inflation. The Department here has kept track of wide gaps in grades – constant, well-understood standards have tempered grade inflation." *Dave Young*

"I served on the 1981 curriculum committee for senior high English language arts. * **Exams had greater impact on improved instruction than any curriculum document**." *Graham Foster*

**Alberta Curriculum for senior high English language arts is changing in 2001, the first change since 1981. Approved resources have changed several times. The 1981 curriculum was an outcomes based document and very forward thinking.*

Theme Five

Excellent Curriculum & Strong Teaching

"Junior High curriculum and instruction was phenomenal – rich, depth, breadth and specificity and clear in grammar etc., critical analysis – deep and complex. It was a stunning breadth of material, very extensive." *Lynn Odynski, Parent*

"Keith Wagner (former director curriculum branch Alberta learning) gave strong leadership in curriculum. He had a sense of what was happening internationally. Keith helped develop other leaders. Alberta curriculum fits a world scheme." *Ed Wittchen, Superintendent, Northern Lights School District.*

"Good teachers – have strong subject backgrounds. Alberta has had a core of well-educated teachers committed to the teaching of English." *Graham Foster*

Theme Six

Strong, Professional Stable Leadership

Reno Bossetti, was Deputy Minister for twenty-two years (until 1995). "Reno was absolutely focused on education. That was his passion; he understood it and he had strong vision. He believed in accountability. He wanted the best." *Dave Young*

"Leadership has had a human services orientation— helping big kids and little kids to learn and live their lives well. Leadership has come to know and recognize that we are a complex interrelated human endeavour—not mechanical. As a result, our accountability models have this organic complexity. There is always the possibility that the mechanical model will win.

"Reno Bossetti was a tough leader who could see that we needed a new approach. Reno was smart enough to know what was needed The Management and Finance Plan of the late 80's and early 90's put in place the bureaucratic infrastructure that now supports partnerships and collaborative work. Strong leadership developed respect within education organizations." *Hal Kluczny*

"Leadership is the single biggest factor in the success of the Alberta education system. In order to get people to be visionary, you have to have leadership. We have had this at all levels – Ministry, College of Alberta School Superintendents, Alberta Teachers' Association, within schools and districts. Good leadership." *Ed Wittchen, Superintendent Northern Lights School Division*

Theme Seven

Balanced Approach To Teaching Reading & to the Self-esteem Movement

"Teaching profession has viewed early literacy as key. Post Secondary Institutions focused on literacy preparation for young teachers but was not dogmatic; therefore, Alberta elementary teachers were not driven by ideology and tended to take pragmatic approaches to reading – combined phonics and whole language. There was little or no polarization in methods during the whole language debate years. Reading in early years is considered very important by everyone throughout the department and in schools." *Dennis Theobold, Alberta Teachers' Association*

"When the now renamed Alberta Education wanted to approve resources for Early Childhood Education classrooms, a group of us who were teachers spent a week, two summers in a row, to go through a roomful of resources sent to the department by publishers and suppliers. **We rejected every single resource that dealt with self-esteem as its priority and/or base. The rationale for this decision was that self-esteem came from knowing how to do something—**and so we felt teachers needed resource money to be spent on resources that supported skill building and knowledge of the way the world worked in the life of the children." *Ann Hill, PHD. Grade one teacher, Earl Buxton School Edmonton Public School, Early childhood Education expert.*

"Regarding the politics of whole language vs. phonics and other ways of teaching reading: In Alberta there is a pretty widely accepted view of balance – using what works. A variety of tools and methods is encouraged and practiced. What works is what is done in the schools." *Leroy Sloan, former Deputy Minister of Education, Executive Secretary Alberta School Boards Association.*

"Was there a curriculum change about 1991? * My perceptions were that we moved to integrating phonics with language arts and the expectation that this was to be done. In 1990-91 my sense is that there was an increased focus on literacy and reading and writing – that this was important and emphasized. The importance of writing was really emphasized in my kids' schools." *Lynn Odynski, Parent*

**There was a major change in the elementary language arts curriculum in 1991. The curriculum integrated skills with clear expectations for end of year in school/grade, and aligned with the grades 3 and 6 provincial assessments for Language Arts*

"Elementary education has thoroughly implemented – real books, complex skills, integrated skills. What I have seen is classrooms rich with print, students reading novels, lots of picture books. There is an absence of workbooks and standard readers. This approach is taught in elementary education at the university, and has been for a long time." *Dianne Oberg*

"Reading is valued and pushed. There is a real structure re: reading that involves parents. Time for reading. Prizes for reading books. Spelling lists come home on Monday to be done for Friday. Parents are explicitly involved in the schooling of their children. **Self-esteem comes from good rich learning experience**. There is a clear expectation that parents will be involved. Students own their learning. But it comes back to the curriculum standards." *Todd Rogers (speaking as a parent)*

Theme Eight

Coherent Planning Based on Systematic Results Reporting

"Compliance is not enough. Commitment is also required. Alberta has had success with strategic, focussed planning for gains in student learning. Reports from the department, and monitoring of district work based on district reports and results serves well to help jurisdictions plan for student learning.

"Without comparative data to a standard and sets of expectations jurisdictions can't plan. We use the language standards in many areas not just testing.

You get compliance because you **give information and let people respond to that information.** But it is erroneous to convey that everyone is in agreement and going in the same direction. Fair to say that when accountability is introduced there is resistance often fuelled out of concern for unfairness and inappropriate measures, or concern about abuse of the accountability measures and methods." *Leroy Sloan*

"Planning process and reporting makes a difference. Planning and accountability – You have to explain your results – leaves us needing to explain and target efforts It works. Focuses me into the next year and what we need to do for kids." *Ed Wittchen*

Theme Nine

High Standards

"More accountability in our system. I wanted standards and consistency. I think my kids benefited. They were at the forefront of these changes but the PISA cohort would have benefited. I remember asking teachers in grade one what they were measuring against. Now it's very clear. That is a big change since my kids started in mid 80's." *Janice Bell, Parent*

"The exams demand complex reading and writing skill. Teachers have to prepare kids for that." *Donna Kelly*

"Alberta has curriculum standards. Then it ties test blueprints to curriculum standards. It also has achievement standards. Curriculum standards are illustrated and can be tied back to test items and then connected to interpretation of results.

"Learner Assessment Branch has had people out on the road doing interpreting results workshops to show teachers the link between curriculum, tests, results and instruction.

"Alberta also has set achievement standards 85% achieving acceptable or passing, and 15% at excellence—above 80%.

"Standards: Teachers understand the standards for their domain. They want all of their kids to know the discipline and have those skills.

"With respect to reading: Curriculum sets out curriculum standards. The tests combine Reading and Writing. The tests are complex things—two-part Language Arts tests—Reading & Writing tied to curriculum. It makes a difference." *Todd Rogers*

Theme Ten

Parent & Community Support & Involvement

"Very strong community of writers, illustrators connected to schools on regular basis. Writers in residence. Project *3-2-1 Write*. Kids writing conferences with parents and teachers. *Magpie*, Edmonton Public Schools kids literacy magazine since early 80's and still going strong. *Youth Write* sponsored by *Writers' Guild of Alberta*. Lots of leadership from School Library World, Public Library, *Writers' Guild of Alberta*, *Alberta Teachers' Association Specialist Councils*—support for literacy is wide-spread." *Dianne Oberg*

"The other thing that happened to this group were programs like Family reading, *Read In Week*, Public Library summer reading programs.

"There was lots of professional development support for language arts teachers in my kids' schools for implementing new curriculum—supported and insisted on by the principal. This was important. The change is phenomenal. Now the kids know what a good piece of work looks like. Kids can say why writing is good, and why not." *Lynn Odynski*

"Public Library use is a factor. There has always been support for public libraries and good programs for kids. The public supports libraries. This is a factor in kids' literacy.

"As well, there is publicity for reading. By grade 10, kids seem to have read a lot. This seems to be the norm for kids here. Not necessarily quality stuff but they read. They like to be read to—even the low-level students. All our kids know that 25% of their final grade will be on a sophisticated reading test.

"Boys read – they like hero stories and fantasy. Boys are literary and literate – they like to read instructions." *Donna Kelly.*

"School Councils Legislation: As a result of School Councils legislation, training and implementation I see young parents now presuming they have a role in their kids education and learning. And the number of men involved is amazing. This makes a big difference." *Janice Bell*

The New Brunswick Study

Summary of the New Brunswick Meetings

- The New Brunswick Meetings
- The PISA Cohort
- New Brunswick Comments
- The Themes
  - **Theme One:** Inclusion of Special Needs Children
  - **Theme Two:** French Immersion & Core French
  - **Theme Three:** Curriculum Development & Implementation
  - **Theme Four:** High Schools, Grades 9& 10, The Foundation Years & Graduation
  - **Theme Five:** Low Expectations & Absence of Standards
  - **Theme Six:** Teacher Training, Assignment, Inservice
  - **Theme Seven:** Assessment & Accountability
  - **Theme Eight:** Flexibility, Transparency & Openness
  - **Theme Nine:** Leadership
  - **Theme Ten:** Good Ideas That Need Support & More Work

Summary of the New Brunswick Meetings

In over fifty meetings around the province people discussed factors that might have contributed to the new Brunswick PISA results, identified residual issues plaguing the education system, and talked about areas where progress is being made.

The New Brunswick Meetings

The New Brunswick meetings included people from all sectors concerned with education: superintendents, directors of education, supervisors, teachers, principals, resource teachers, counsellors, team leaders, parents, some district education committee members, university professors and officials, ministry of education officials, organized lobby groups, interested individuals, government officials.

Over a hundred people grappled with the questions

- *Why, in your opinion, did New Brunswick 15-year old students perform as they did on the 2000—OECD/PISA assessment of reading* (i.e. in the bottom quartile of the participating countries/provinces).
- *What did New Brunswick do to foster literacy for the PISA cohort—students who started grade one in 1990?*
- *What changes (short-term, long-term) are needed in New Brunswick to foster the high-level literacy students need for their adult lives?*
- *What projects, initiatives, actions are making a difference?*

The same issues were identified by almost everyone.

The PISA Cohort

There was consensus that the PISA cohort was negatively impacted by the constant educational change and experiment that has characterized education in New Brunswick over last dozen years.

The PISA cohort started school just before there were public kindergartens. They were in elementary school learning to read when play-based learning and whole language were being tried out, often without clear understanding of the theory in practice.

Many were in French Immersion programs where students' reading problems may not have been apparent until middle school. There were no system-wide programs or strategies for addressing reading problems faced by children in Immersion programs. Further there were no system-wide strategies offered

to uni-lingual parents of Immersion students for participating in their children's education. Few schools had programs for at-risk students. Generally, schools believed in promotion, but often without strategic programming to address learning problems.

The PISA cohort was in middle school early in the province's transition to the middle school structure and philosophy. They were the students of the Foundation Years Program. High expectations for work of substance were generally lacking in their educational experience.

The PISA results are the consequence of an accumulation of badly managed educational experiments that affected a whole cohort of students.

This is an educational crisis. The most serious problems are yet to be addressed.

New Brunswick Comments

People's comments clustered in ten categories or themes—each illustrates a set of serious, pervasive, not readily resolved issues still affecting the quality of education in New Brunswick.

In the summary of comments, I do not identify speakers or districts. The same comments emerged regardless of district, institution, or speakers' role with respect to education.

The Themes

The themes

- Theme One: Inclusion of Special Needs Children
- Theme Two: French Immersion & Core French
- Theme Three: Curriculum Development & Implementation
- Theme Four: High Schools: Grades 9&10, The Foundation Years, Graduation
- Theme Five: Low expectations & absence of standards
- Theme Six: Teacher training, Assignment, Inservice
- Theme Seven: Assessment & Accountability
- Theme Eight: Flexibility, Transparency & Openness
- Theme Nine: Leadership
- Theme Ten: Good Ideas That Need Support & More Work

Themes from the New Brunswick Meetings

Theme One
Inclusion of Special Needs Children

"In the name of inclusion – there is no action taken. Kindness gets confused with having expectations. Low expectations are accepted in the climate of being caring."

"We have taken the notion of inclusion to an absurd level so children who are not functioning are not pulled aside."

"People believe that if they take action that would address a kid's learning they are breaking the "rules." They believe they are not allowed to take appropriate action."

"The problem is that the system tries to believe that all kids should get everything together. Teachers won't and can't move kids into grouping that will support the kids' learning."

"Inclusion has been pursued to the point of the ridiculous. Everybody all the time in the regular classroom. And now, teachers do this without health services. No one is being served."

"A Teacher's Aid isn't enough. We're not meeting needs of special kids. Huge rise in autistic kids."

"There has to be more intervention in primary years. The special needs kids take some of the resource teacher's time – e.g. to cover the TA's breaks."

"Resource teachers tell classroom teachers what to do with kids. Then they go on to another classroom, leaving the teacher with the problems of the whole class and the T.A's as well. There is no pull out. District feels no power to change this."

"Inclusion is a problem for teachers who have no training."

"Inclusion: New Brunswick went whole hog without planning."

"Hard-core behaviour disordered kids: we have to get these kids out of regular classes. We have to have funding for support. Parents are in denial. The school is the only source of respite care."

"No alternative but to integrate behaviour disorder kids into a regular grade 9 class with 33 kids."

Theme Two

French Immersion & Core French

"There is a high restriction on the books available to Immersion kids and French books cost a lot."

"There are learning problems that result from the Immersion program. Early Immersion discourages reading in children—it is too hard to find interesting stuff in French at reading/vocabulary level kids can handle. Books in French are very expensive. So there aren't many. **English reading is discouraged or ridiculed for kids in the immersion program**."

"Kids are in Immersion because the parents want the kids there. There is no help for reading problems. When the kids are finally moved out of Immersion, they have no language skills in either language, and many poor habits such as poor listening skills."

"English Core has all of the discipline problems."

"Policy #309 has had impact on how the school operates because it stipulates hours of instruction in French."

"Even though legislation doesn't allow for grouping, parents do this anyway through the French Immersion program.

- The French Immersion program and teachers are separate from the English/core French.
- Because the programs and teachers are separated, the students are separated as well.
- Teachers believe the English program is a ghetto because the immersion program draws the top students leaving the weaker students and those with special needs in the English program.
- The population in the English program is skewed left—students with behavioural problems and special needs are all in the English program."

"We could handle this problem if we had a class size cap for the Core French program and a cap on the number of special needs kids in a class."

"French Immersion put an enormous pressure on teachers who teach English subjects because there are more specials needs students in English classes. This has changed our attitude in the classroom."

"It has created an elite grouping. It's difficult to convince English teachers that there are difficult students in French Immersion. Immersion students do outperform English students and have fewer discipline problems."

"I teach math and have the Core kids – 21 out of 31 on IEP's & modification. This is common. It is overwhelming for teachers."

"Majority of Immersion kids are in Immersion to stay out of Core."

"Classes in the English program are not gender balanced, and this is definitely a stress on the system. Boys and girls have different learning styles. Now that we have provincial assessments, we have the data to support gender differences."

"Immersion teachers chosen because of language level rather than teaching or subject skills. This causes problems for kids."

"De-facto streaming. The Immersion program is the only place kids can go for decent program and classmates."

"Compliance with Policy 309 is based on **time** not on **quality of learning.**"

"French Immersion is sold as the enrichment program. There is no real enrichment program."

"French Immersion creates problems. Capable kids end up in Immersion."

"In Core French, the second language is weak."

"Early Immersion holds back really bright kids. They don't have enough language for enrichment activities and the materials in French are not available."

"Immersion dropouts have learned a whole bunch of bad habits, for example, poor listening. They don't listen because they have not understood what is going on for several years in school. When they are pulled out of the program, they take this practiced non-listening into the Core class."

"Low morale in English Core group."

Theme Three

Curriculum Development & Implementation

"Districts inundated with change."

"Implementation and change—Not done effectively. Mass confusion."

"Curriculum overload – too many objectives. Not enough time to teach. Not enough time to implement. Too much curriculum change."
"Intensive Core Pilot is yet one more change. There are no resources. Drains everything else. We're just at the beginning of people knowing the last changes and now we introduce another program."

"High School Math: There was no development process, no consultation, presented as done deal. We have full year math 9 & 10 (2 levels) and 11 (2 levels) in place for two years. The latest Change is at grade 11 – First semester compulsory, 2nd optional. Why?"

"Decisions are based on singular ideas. When those don't work, they are gone."

"Too much personality – one person can have too much influence."

"Creativity dominated over clarity—in writing for example. Don't blame the teachers. It was the curriculum."

"No challenge to top kids. Then discipline problems arise. The bar is lowered so everyone can do it."

"Very centralized decision making and researched based curriculum changes without piloting or intensive consultation. There is lack of transparency. One person's prevailing philosophy can be extremely influential. We have had change for the sake of change at a furious pace. No one understands the causes."

"Teachers have to have ownership of process and change."

"Constant change of curriculum philosophy has to impact on kids."

Theme Four

High Schools
Grades 9 & 10
Foundation Years
Graduation

"Children can't handle workloads, so standards are being lowered to keep them in school."

"A positive in Grade 10 is to group them at the same ability levels; this keeps the class sizes down and keeps a better handle on things. The stronger kids are together."

"The higher achievers get frustrated with the lower achievers and they resent not moving ahead to learn more. They, therefore, achieve less on purpose so that they don't have to help others."

"High schools dislike having 4 specialties (45 hours each) and grade 10 must take 3 out of 4 with one 90 hours. Not allowed to take two out of four, do not have a choice and are told they will do it. The system is forcing students to take things they hate.

"Our priorities as a province are
French language/French Immersion
Retention in school/social promotion
Everyone graduates – zero dropout"

"High School teachers are frustrated. There is no time. Foundation Years – poorly implemented. The PISA cohort was hit by this. Really uneven math and science."

"Foundation Years – a disaster."

"There is a belief in credentials. Value is placed on the high school certificate itself, not on achievement."

"Foundation Years Program: there was no mechanism for feedback from schools. The program was totally unmanageable."

"No implementation period for Foundation Years. It was a major change in philosophy. Provincially teachers didn't buy in."

"No streaming allowed for grade 9. Teachers are expected to differentiate within their classrooms. The rule is you cannot ability group. Teachers do group and regroup. But they all feel they are violating the rules."

"High school coping with kids who have no skill set from middle school. Must group kids if we are going to meet their learning deficits."

"Teachers not qualified to teach in disciplines."

"Everyone in the province is supposed to timetable the same way for grades 9-10. "Grade 9 & 10 causes scheduling nightmares."

"Grade 9-10 teachers treated differently from the other high school teachers. This creates a ghetto within the staff."

"Kids want to be in high school which to them means a credit model and flexibility of program, and being treated like high school kids.

"The Foundation Program denied kids what they were seeking—being more grown up. Result—no work ethic in the kids—why bother, they could repeat or wait to do things until they decided they were ready. Very poor model for middle adolescents."

"Graduation dictates everything—all scheduling, exams everything"

Theme Five

Low expectations & absence of standards

"View of achievement here is to have low expectations."

"We need to have standards and need to have people rise to meet expectations. If I had one way to move now, it would be to **set standards**. We are too forgiving of poor performance."

"There doesn't seem to be effort to raise the basic standard."

"There are expectations for getting work done, for classroom behaviour, but those for performance keep being lowered."

"We are not serving either end of spectrum well."

"Teachers are lowering standards in students work; there is no time to have students re-do the assignments so teachers accept it. Although work is not done right, students are pushed on."

"Teachers feel students have to be rewarded when an assignment is finally handed in so as not to discourage the child but, at the same time, this is a disservice to the child when work is unsatisfactory."

"In some communities, the parental pressure is for everyone to pass. In others, more balanced."

"We are catering to students at the lower levels, your average child, which means that our top students/enrichment students are being ignored. This is frustrating for the high achievers."

"Teachers are torn between being kind and having expectations."

"Expectations are very low. The bar gets lowered."

"This is a system that nurtures to the detriment of kids. The kids have no demands placed on them in school and can't cope with university."

"One size fits all doesn't work for anyone. We need streaming."

"New Brunswick is sensitive to issue of achievement and to tying achievement to planning. Groping for standards."

"There is no expectation of people doing well."

Theme Six

Teacher Training, Assignment & Inservice

"About 30% of the staff are new teachers who have no background training in literacy."

"Teacher qualifications – Teachers are often teaching out of their disciplines."

"The grade 9-10 teaming requires teaching out of your discipline. Academic standards are not priority."

"We must have teachers who are qualified in subjects along with accountability. We need teacher evaluation."

"Professional Development now is pull out model which is costly. Districts must cover supply teachers, and kids are left with a supply teacher who might not be trained in the subjects the teacher is teaching. This is a big problem if teachers are out for several days. Kids' learning suffers."

"PD – important issue provincially – Critical issue. Teachers need more training. Teachers aren't always comfortable with implementing all curriculum."

"Teachers need to be really well trained to teach reading K-2."

"French Immersion teachers know the language, but not the subjects they have to teach."

Theme Seven

Assessment & Accountability

"Teachers can't say what end of year expectations are. Accountability is an issue."

"Math results – reflect a lot of muddle."

"School Improvement Plans and Staff Growth Plans should focus on literacy."

"All that is valued in assessment is the study skills. Don't want pressure for kids from testing."

"Kids take the Provincial Exams seriously but not seriously enough."

"Grade 8 Language Arts Assessment helps."

"There was considerable confusion about the process called expectation setting used for the Grade 3 and 5 assessments. No one really understood."

"Hard to track assessments and use them as a planning tool."

"Schools are expected to know how to use results. Schools don't know. Because principals don't know how to read the data, they don't use the test data. Results don't filter to teachers."

"Grade 8 Language Arts – should be in late spring. Would allow for schools to use the results."

"Need assessment for French achievement in grade 8."

"Assessment not articulated to classroom."

"Middle School Assessment has no teeth from kids' perspective. There has been response from teachers to the seriousness of the grade 8 literacy. Move administration time to April. Get results back to schools. Tie results to end of year mark."

"Over all positive effects. Assessment focuses teachers on curriculum. We account to the community. There is more commitment in developing plans."

"Testing is too focused on the teacher/school, not on the whole system. Data is intimidating and can be demoralizing. We worry about abuse of data."

"Approach has been to use research on best teaching practice and to ignore test data."

"High school tests: We don't use the data to improve teaching and delivery of curriculum. We look at it as a student evaluation. We aren't making adjustments to curriculum to improve learning. We need better alignment, better testing, results, curriculum."

"Grade 8 assessment: teachers pay a bit of attention. But we have a difficult time with assessment. Why are we doing it? We can't handle the data. No one is trained to use the data."

"Grade 8 re-writes in grade 10 are a real problem. Preparation is onerous. They are a nightmare to administer."

"Move Grade 8 assessment to end of grade 8. Make the results useful & manageable. Get the results to schools by Sept. 1."

Theme Eight
Flexibility Transparency & Openness

"Open, honest dialogue is not part of this system. Open disclosure—no."

"Told – "This is the way it is." In reality the two don't match."

"Goals and philosophy do not match."

"The Department sets the goal and then sets parameters about how to do it, making goals impossible to achieve."

"We come together to hide the bad stuff. The new District Education Committees are not focused on kids' learning."

"Challenging the status quo is not done here. It is perceived as hostile."

"There needs to be a climate change. We need to be able to critically examine issues and disagree without feeling intimidated."

"Results are not public knowledge. Local districts don't really know what is going on."

"Closed society. No open communication."

"This is a conformist environment – in society. Professional excellence not lauded. It is hard to be the person who challenges. The people on the edges are not valued."

"There is a narrowing philosophy emanating from department. For example, no streaming at any cost."

"Issue of rules. People still believe that the rules from Fredericton impede sensible action in the field."

"Independence is discouraged, for example, alternative programs need ministerial approval, which is very hard to get—e.g. work experience."

"One size fits all for Districts – Districts don't feel they have flexibility."

"Change is dictated from top. Schools don't really have a voice or way of offering suggestions or of raising issues.

"Tolerance for difference here is thin. The approach is autocratic. The Department won't give people in the schools the authority to do what they know is best."

Theme Nine
Leadership

"Principals make a huge difference."

"The best people aren't always promoted—the Peter Principle. So much change in leadership."

"People wait for decisions."

"Department appears out of touch with how things actually operate in the schools. Big gap between Department of Education and what really goes on."

"Decision making – people don't look at the interconnectedness of decisions."

"Leadership can't focus staff on learning issues because there is no real leadership stability. With all of the changes, there has been turmoil in people's personal lives—moves, relocation. All of the leadership energy is in managing change. Without focus for change, it is very difficult to implement. Can't sustain policy when we are always re-doing it."

"District Education Committees are trying to learn about governance, and are still sorting micro issues from macro—the "big picture." Everyone is new to this. In the Parent Support Committees, there is some confusion about relationships."

Theme Ten

Good Ideas that Need Support & More Work

"K-2 focus is establishing benchmarks. When children are not successful, they will be grouped for specific skills. We need to define what high expectations means and looks like."

"We know what research about retention says, so what do we do about children who are not successful or need more time? Resource Teachers can't help them all. We are hoping our K-2 focus will address some of these deficiencies."

"Progress being made with the introduction of the Professional Seminar Series. This initiative is in its 3rd year with two cycles per year. Covers curriculum; developing behaviour plans and teachers suggest topics. All are held at night in partnership with NBCC."

"More Early Intervention – with program focus."

"Identify At-Risk kids."

"The Math mentors program is working."

"Teach arts and Physical Education in French. Intensify Math and English."

"There must be a change from believing all kids are the same. There is no tolerance here for any differences."

"Relationship with parents – Schools need to make parents part of the whole thing. Now, Parents are out of the picture. Average parent doesn't know!"

"Leadership from the Department is essential."

"Literacy Expectations by end of grade 3."

"Solve the language problem by adopting a bi-lingual education model for everyone. Half the day in one language. Half in the other."

"Early Years – limit curriculum to literacy and numeracy in Early literacy. Teach reading in K-1-2. Focus on making sure kids read. Need more highly trained people to intervene in early years."

"We need early intervention at home."

"Need a communication strategy to all parts of system re: parents as partners."

"The New Language Arts curriculum and the First Steps program help. Stable curriculum is important."

"If kids were firmly grounded, parents could make more informed decisions about the best program for their child. If we had everyone in English only for K-2, we could still make goals of the province re: second language." *(Note: this is a frequently presented solution—with variations—to some of the problems resulting from mis-management of the French Immersion program. This solution ignores the competing argument about the apparent efficacy of early immersion).*

"Have to be able to address the At-Risk kids."

"*First Steps* Makes a difference for those who are working with the program in a genuine way. It has a diagnostic use. Everyone gets training."

"Do *First Steps* with English and Immersion."

"There are huge discrepancies on readiness of kids entering K Immersion. We need to monitor K-2 very carefully."

"We have to move back to focus on literacy. Reading is the central skill. We are starting to do this, but we have to put a major properly resourced thrust here."

"Get rid of K-2 Immersion. Focus on reading. Couple this with PD focus on literacy instruction and curriculum."

"Re-build libraries. Make books important."

"Good stuff: Teachers learning to teach kids to read. Getting kids involved with math for a better foundation. Grouping kids at their reading levels. Keeping class sizes down in early years."

"There is something is wrong in 0-5. Readiness for Kindergarten is not there. We Need an Early Childhood intervention program. It is not enough to red-flag problems. We need program.

"We have to educate parents. It is not good enough to pick up the extreme problems. We need to intervene in the low average group."

"Need: Balance. Teachers need the flexibility to do what they know is best for the kids in their care. Curriculum is framework. But school needs flexibility within framework."

Alberta & New Brunswick Differences

I. Governance

II. Program Delivery—-Meeting Students' Learning Needs

III. Standards

IV. Assessment, Achievement, Reporting & Accountability

Alberta and New Brunswick — Differences in Education

I. Governance

The *Province of Alberta School Act* and the *New Brunswick Education Act* are different in tone and character although both address a similar common core of school and education issues that require legislation.

Changes in Governance

Both acts have been amended several times in the past several years. Changes to the New Brunswick governance structure and legislation represented several major shifts that had perceived and real impact on schools and school districts.

Alberta too, has experienced significant structural change since the late 1980's. It reduced the number of School Boards and Districts between 1993 and 1995, from 180 to 62, an action taken much earlier in New Brunswick. It changed the way it funds school boards, reviewed and reduced all of its education regulations, and simplified the act. These changes have directly and extensively impacted school boards and jurisdictions. They have had less impact on schools and classrooms.

Language as a Reflection of Values

The most telling difference in the legislation governing education in the two provinces is the language and emphasis in the respective acts.

Along with detailing the governance model and roles, the Alberta act stresses access to and the **quality of education**. The New Brunswick act's stress is on **deportment**, **order** and **discipline**. For example in the section on teachers

The *Alberta School Act* says:

> **Teachers**
> *18 A Teacher while providing instruction or supervision must*
> *(a) provide instruction competently to students*
> *(b) teach the courses of study and education programs that are prescribed, approved or authorized pursuant to this act*
> *(c) promote goals and standards applicable to the provision of education. . .*
> *(d) encourage and foster learning in students*
> *(e) maintain, under the direction of the principal, order and discipline*

The New Brunswick *Education Act* says:

Responsibilities of Teachers

25(1)A teacher shall

(a) maintain a regular supervision of the pupils on the school grounds, repress the use of improper language and have care that games are honourably played

(b) process, according to the instructions issued by the minister, the record of attendance of pupils transferred. . . . within the province . . .

(c) keep with care and accuracy records of pupil attendance, inquire into and note all cases of tardiness or absence. . .

(d) preserve until the end of the term the permit granted. . . to any new pupil

(e) practice such discipline as may be exercised by a kind firm and judicious parent in his or her family, avoid indiscreet haste in the discipline of his or her pupils and, in any difficult cases, apply to the principal for advice and direction.

These two job descriptions illustrate the fundamental differences in the education systems in Alberta and New Brunswick.

The job description of a teacher in Alberta is **to teach the curriculum competently.** The job description of a teacher in New Brunswick is **to maintain order, attendance records and discipline.**

II. Program Delivery — Meeting Students' Learning Needs

Organizing for Optimal Learning
Organizing Based on Belief

The differences between Alberta and New Brunswick in educating students show clearly in the language of two other documents: the Alberta *Guide to Education*—the policy document that sets out the requirements for schools to follow in delivering education—and *Practices to Look For in our Education Communities K-12, New Brunswick, Department of Education, 2001. "Look For"* is the closest New Brunswick document to the Alberta *Guide to Education.* New Brunswick does not have a parallel document.

The Role of Schools

The *Guide to Education* like the School Act is explicit about students meeting standards and being taught the curriculum. How schools do this is up to the schools and the school communities. *"The school's primary responsibility is to* ***ensure*** *that* ***students meet or exceed the provincial standards****, as reflected in the Student Learning Outcomes, the Alberta Programs of Study,*

*provincial achievement tests, diploma examinations and graduation requirements.. . . **Schools have authority** to deploy resources and may use any instructional technique acceptable to the community as long as the standards are achieved." Alberta Learning,* Guide to Education ECS-Grade 12, *2001*

New Brunswick's *"Look For"* document specifies what people in schools are to believe, and how they are expected to organize. *"Look For"* says its purpose is to give *". . .a statement of the Education Beliefs of the Province of New Brunswick, to highlight Best Practices. . ."*

Students' Learning Vs Teaching Method

"Look For" does not link beliefs and best practices with children's actual learning. The beliefs and methods appear to be ends in themselves. As such, they have potential to become dogma—more important than the learning they are intended to support. There is considerable evidence that this is what often happens in New Brunswick.

Essential Learning Outcomes

The Alberta *Guide to Education* sets out the definition of *Basic Education* and the essential *Student Learning Outcomes* that fulfill this most basic requirement for all students. *"Look For"* sets out the *Essential Graduation Learnings for all Students in Atlantic Canada.*

The first six essential *Student Learning Outcomes* in the *Guide* explicitly address learning in core subjects.

"A basic education will allow students to:

- ***read** for information, understanding and enjoyment*
- ***write** and **speak** clearly, accurately and appropriately for the context*
- ***use mathematics** to solve problems in business, science and daily-life situations*
- *understand the physical world, ecology and the diversity of life*
- *understand the scientific method the nature of science and technology and their application to daily life*
- *know the history and geography of Canada and have a general understanding of world history and geography*

Literacy Outcomes

Many of the essential leanings in the two documents are similar—especially those related to Social Studies and citizenship. The notable difference is that **it is hard to find reading and writing as explicit essential learnings in the Atlantic Canada list.**

The Atlantic Canada list says, *"Graduates will be able to use the listening, viewing, speaking, reading and writing modes of languages(s) and mathematical and scientific concepts and symbols to think, learn and communicate effectively."* One can certainly contend that this statement encompasses the first four on the Alberta list. However, it is less explicit, and it emphasizes the mode or process rather than the outcome of learning.

Aside from the statement of *Essential Graduation Learnings*, it is difficult to discern from the *"Look For"* document that the job of schools is to help all children to learn to their maximum capacity.

"Look For" concentrates on preferred methodology for teachers. The Alberta *Guide to Education* provides information about current research in learning and teaching as a reference list. Everything is focussed on standards and students' learning and on the flexible arrangements allowed to achieve learning goals.

Program Delivery

New Brunswick is prescriptive about how schools deliver programs and how they should organize. "Look For" says, *"Heterogeneous classes are the norm. Long-term ability grouping does not occur in the common curriculum K-10, with the possible exception of grade 10 mathematics and English Language Arts in the latter part of the year."*

This effort to achieve uniform grouping of all children comes from deeply held societal values about the importance of equity, and from strongly held beliefs of some educators that differentiated grouping of children is potentially damaging.

Educators are genuinely concerned that children not be labelled or inappropriately constrained by virtue of their school programs and/or classroom arrangements. Society genuinely wishes to care well for its children.

Consequences

However, the consequence of directed uniformity appears to be that students' learning needs are not well served. Judging from provincial, national and international assessment results, this is true for students at all points on the learning continuum—from the weakest to the most able K to 12.

The assessment results show that the education system is not focussed on achievement. The New Brunswick system rarely describes itself as responsible for learning, but often describes itself as nurturing and protective of children. The description reflects social values and beliefs that provide an important foundation for a respectful and caring community.

Unfortunately, in many New Brunswick schools, these values have been translated into classroom structures that serve the learning needs of few.

The mandated heterogeneous groups sometimes create extremely difficult teaching situations, and do not always support maximum learning. The practice also leads to large numbers of parents selecting French Immersion programs for their children not for language learning or educational enrichment, but to protect their children from what they believe to be difficult conditions in some of the Core French classrooms.

The irony of this situation is that neither the egalitarian goals of the belief system nor the learning needs of children are being met through the heterogeneous grouping philosophy.

All legislative and policy documents guiding the Alberta education system stress that the job of schools is **to maximize every child's learning.** Schools and school districts are charged with the responsibility of doing that in the best and most sensible ways possible given the nature of the school, the students, and the community. This is a fundamental difference between the two systems.

Inclusion

There is no appreciable difference in the legislation of the two provinces regarding inclusion of exceptional children in school. Inclusionary education has been part of the Alberta system since the mid 1980's, just as it has been in New Brunswick. In Alberta as in New Brunswick, the "regular classroom" is the preferred setting for special need children.

All exceptional children are included in the regular school organization, and *"School Boards are responsible for ensuring that students with needs receive adequate special education programs; have access to the most enabling setting that meet their needs; have regular opportunities to interact with their peers, to enjoy the life of the school and to participate in local community activities; and have access to specialized classes and services as required."* Policy 1.6.1—*Educational placement of Students with Special Needs*/Procedure 1.

Alberta manages inclusion differently from New Brunswick. The goal is to maximize learning. Policy stresses responses to special needs that enhance learning, but the school is responsible to decide how best to organize to meet children's learning needs. The New Brunswick *Guidelines on Integration* are more directive about how schools should operate than is the Alberta policy.

French Immersion

A fundamental difference in the two systems is the size of the New Brunswick French Immersion program—up to 60% of the children in some districts. Alberta has a large French Immersion

program, but provincially the proportion is just under 10% of the total provincial cohort in K-9.

Virtually all Alberta school districts offer French Immersion and in small centres, the same de facto streaming experienced in New Brunswick will be an issue. However, Alberta school districts offer many different programs, so the impact of a single program is difficult to discern.

Alberta does not have language policy such as Policy 309. Nor is it a bilingual province. However, the Alberta French Immersion program is large enough K-9 for there to be several years of provincial data about Immersion students' performance on Achievement tests.

Immersion students write the same tests as their English peers, but write translations in Math, Science, and Social Studies (grades 6 and 9). They write the same English Language Arts tests, and a French Language Arts test in grades3, 6 and 9. Results show them out-performing their English peers in all subjects. It is important to acknowledge the demographic skew in the Albert French Immersion population, but the program attracts children from across socio-economic groups, and now includes some special needs children. The key variable is parental involvement, curricula that are tightly aligned with the English curricula, and high standards.

Given the size of the New Brunswick immersion program, the national and international results for New Brunswick at the higher levels in reading, math and science should be comparable to those for Alberta. French Immersion should be a program that provides some educational gain. **Why that is not the case for New Brunswick requires careful, dispassionate, thoughtful investigation prior to action.**

III. Standards

All of the Alberta documents—curriculum, policy, assessment, funding, regulatory, legislative—emphasize that the goal of the education system is to have **all** students **meet or exceed** explicitly stated **standards of achievement**. This is not the case with the New Brunswick documents.

Historical Context

There is a social and historical basis for this approach to education in Alberta. Alberta is a new place. With the exception of the aboriginal peoples, everyone who lives in Alberta has come there from someplace else within the last 120 years.

One of the characteristics of the immigrant experience is that new people pressure the education system to provide children with the skills and knowledge that will ensure their futures.

"New comers" want a less arduous future for their children than what they or their parents or grandparents endured. Or, if the new comers have come because they are well educated and prosperous, they want nothing less for their children.

Diversity

Further, the population of Alberta is diverse in all ways. Diversity brings with it its own issues, but it is a great benefit to a society. A diverse population places pressure on an education system to be flexible and to address differences.

Differences must not only be tolerated and respected they must be celebrated.

The pressure in Alberta is for schools to be different from one another in their character, and to reflect their communities. However, if such a diverse system is to serve people well, it must be arranged to ensure that regardless of where a child attends school, the same expectations and programs prevail. **This leads to an educational culture of standards and expectation in the context of diversity.** Consequently, the language of standards governs all education policy and practice in Alberta

New Brunswick & Standards

New Brunswick curriculum documents are organized in learning outcomes, but the outcome statements are not explicit about what students are expected to learn, to what degree of complexity they are expected to learn program outcomes, or how this will be discerned. There are no provincial standards for students' achievement on provincial assessments and examinations. **There are no stated and widely understood educational standards.**

Opportunity for Change

In New Brunswick, there is considerable interest amongst educators to change the status quo with respect to standards. Districts and the ministry are working on innovative projects to establish benchmarks and expectations for early literacy and mathematics. **Such programs need to be showcased, championed, and supported**. Standards have to be appropriate for New Brunswick schools and curricula.

Many educators express strong interest in using provincial assessment results to improve instruction and programming. This is not possible given how results are currently reported, but the reporting and assessment design can easily be changed to reflect expectations and to provide consistent useful information to schools. Doing this will have some associated costs, but the costs can be kept to a minimum, and a process for incremental implementation established. (See *Recommendations to the Minister*).

Made at Home Standards

There is desire and interest in the education community to develop shared language around standards. This is not easily done since the word "standards" has many meanings and interpretations. However, interest and perceived need amongst educators is the catalyst for working out shared understanding of the concept of standards in the New Brunswick context. It is an opportunity for educators to **develop clear, explicit and public standards for New Brunswick's students' learning**.

IV. Assessment, Achievement, Reporting, and Accountability

2001 Provincial Assessment Results New Brunswick

New Brunswick Report Card 2001 illustrates the shocking state of student achievement in this province.

New Brunswick has a long-standing respected assessment program that meets all normal technical, development, administration and scoring standards particularly given fiscal realities of the province.

Schools and Districts are starting to pay attention to assessment results, but few seem concerned about how poor the results of the 2001 provincial assessments actually are!

New Brunswick did not need PISA data to show that the education system is not serving students' learning needs. The evidence is there in every provincial assessment administered in 2001. If schools were focussed on students' learning, everyone would be working on plans to address the learning deficits reflected in the provincial assessment results.

Alberta reports its provincial assessment data provincially, to the district and to the school at three standards of achievement—acceptable standard (usually 50% or pass), standard of excellence (usually 80% or honours), and below acceptable standard (below 50% fail).

Achievement Standards

In addition, Alberta has established external expectations for performance at the provincial level. It expects 85% of students in the province to achieve the acceptable standard or better, and 15% to achieve the standard of excellence.

If the Alberta standard of at least 85% of the students in the province achieving an assessment score of 50% (pass) or better is applied to the 2001 New Brunswick assessments, these are the results:

> *Mathematics 111/112*—Zero. Only 57% of the students in the province achieved a pass or better. **43% fail**! No districts meet the standard of 85% passing.

Mathematics 113—Zero. Only 56% of the students pass. **44% fail.** No districts achieve the standard.

English 111/112—Zero. Only 58% pass. **42% fail.** No districts meet the standard.

English 113—Zero. 71% pass. **29% fail.** No districts meet the standard.

The huge percentage of students failing these critical senior high school courses indicates serious lack of attention to students' learning.

In English, between 30 and 40 % of students are demonstrating exceptionally weak reading and writing skills. In math, almost 45% are unsuccessful. **This should be of great concern to everyone in the system.**

If there are other possible causes for these deplorable results, such as schools and students not taking the exams seriously and not trying their best to succeed, then the situation is even less acceptable.

Middle Level Assessments

The results from the Middle Level Assessments measured against the Alberta standard of 85% achieving acceptable (50%) or better are as follows:

English Language Proficiency—Zero. Only 76% of the students in the province achieve pass or better. **24% fail.** No districts meet the 85% standard, but two come close, with 80% of their students passing.

One quarter of New Brunswick students fail this assessment of essential reading and writing skill.

French Immersion Results

Middle Level English Proficiency

Given the generally more advantaged nature of the French Immersion group, it is reasonable to expect all students in that group to at least pass the *Middle Level English Language Proficiency*. In fact, studies of French Immersion students' achievement on English Language Arts tests in Alberta would lead one to expect exceptionally high scores for the immersion group. Significantly more of these students pass (89% early immersion and 92% intermediate immersion), but **they should all at least pass**.

Middle Level Mathematics

Middle Level Mathematics Assessment—Zero. No districts meet the 85% standard. Only 53% of the students in the province pass, **47% fail**.

No successful school system can tolerate nearly 50% of its students failing mathematics at this basic level.

French Immersion Results Math

As with the Middle Level English, the Immersion groups do better. More pass, but given the nature of the French Immersion population, these results are not as good as they should be. **Most of these students should at least pass middle level math.** Only 73% of the early immersion group and 68% of the intermediate group pass, and just passing grade 8 math is not good enough for the modern world.

Elementary Assessments

Results from the Grade 3 and Grade 5 New Brunswick assessments are reported in terms of students meeting, exceeding or being below expectations.

Grade Three

Provincially, all students meet expectations on the components of the grade three assessment—math, science, English reading French Immersion reading.

Assuming that the expectations reflect the outcomes of the curriculum, and the complexity expected of students at the end of grade three, these results except for science at show that most children are meeting expectations. However, the data provide relatively little useful information.

Grade Five

Provincially all students meet expectations on the components of the grade five assessments—math, science, and reading. As well all districts meet expectations on these components, none exceed expectations.

However the scores on the two writing components are poor—

> Writing I: 51% of the students in the province acceptable or better. **49% produce unacceptable work.** No districts meet the standard of at least 85% at or above acceptable.
>
> Writing II: 60% of the students in the province acceptable or better**. 40% produce unacceptable work**. No districts meet the standard.

What happened between grades three and five?

FSL Grade 6

French Second Language assessment Grade 6:

66% Acceptable in Reading

67% Acceptable in Writing

Quite a long way from meeting a standard of 85% Acceptable

French Oral Proficiency

French Language Oral Proficiency Assessments are much closer to showing results that meet expectations, and there are stated proficiency goals.

However, the numbers of students who actually take these assessments is very small compared to the number of students enrolled in FSL programs.

These results provide little information other than how well the students tested performed. In order to assess the effectiveness of the program, there needs to be data about attrition, and much more comprehensive data from the early grades.

Comparison to Alberta

A comparison to the Alberta assessment results is difficult since the tests and standards are different.

There is general agreement that the Alberta achievement tests in grades 3, 6, and 9 and the grade 12 Diploma examinations set much higher demands than do the New Brunswick tests. But since the grades at which they are administered are not the same, direct comparison is complex.

The only grade level with some degree of comparability is grade 3. Results on the Alberta 2001 Grade 3 English Language arts achievement test:

Reading: 87.8 % achieved acceptable standard (50%) or better
35.7% standard of excellence (80%) or better

Writing: 89.7% acceptable or better; 18.4 % excellent or better

Grade 3 mathematics results are similar—87.6% acceptable, 25.4% excellent

Accountability

All districts in Alberta monitor assessment results closely and compare themselves to the province over time. Results from assessments and improvements in achievement overtime are reported in School Authority annual reports to the province as part of the annual monitoring and planning cycle. School data feeds into the district data.

This is not yet the case in New Brunswick, but districts are working on using results in School Improvement Planning, and are interested in using results to monitor program effectiveness.

Study Conclusions

I. Context

II. The Issues

I. Context

New Brunswickers pride themselves on fostering a kind and gentle society. This is a laudable societal goal. What is startling is how this belief about deportment translates into school practices.

In the name of kindness, towards children who have difficulty learning, expectations are lowered, more capable children are expected to put their own learning aside and help those having difficulty. In the name of kindness, children at both extremes on the learning continuum are disenfranchised. They are schooled in a nurturing environment that does not support the best possible conditions for their very different learning needs. Nurture supersedes expectation for their learning.

Some extremely hard choices face decision makers. One choice is to allow the status quo of kind, gentle, accepting attitudes to be perverted into excuse for inaction, or for inappropriate educational decisions.

This is likely the choice that will be the most popular, because it honours traditions and the practices that are most comfortable for the most people.

The consequence of staying to the status quo is that achievement of most New Brunswick students will remain low, and perhaps drift downward. Very capable students, and those of the more privileged in society, will do reasonably well despite the system.

Nothing will change New Brunswick's achievement results and the low quality education it is providing its students except a systemic change in attitude about children's learning.

Until there is systemic belief and understanding that children learn differently and that the education system is responsible to educate **all** children in society to their maximum potential, results and real achievement will stay low.

II. The Issues

The consistent lack of performance of the New Brunswick education system on national and international assessments demonstrates that the system is under performing generally.

The data from New Brunswick provincial assessments confirm that even on the assessments developed and administered in New Brunswick and based on New Brunswick curriculum results are poor.

The data indicate this is an education system that is not educating the young people of the province.

Sadly, it is an education system that is not working despite talented, dedicated and hard working educators in all sectors of the system.

The contributors to the failure of the system to educate its young people include

- Lack of Leadership
- Absence of Vision
- Poor understanding on the part of parents of how to support their children's learning
- Uneven practice on the part of schools to engage parents in educationally supportive activities
- No standards or explicit expectations
- Absence of a culture of healthy dissent and discussion
- Organizational structures and practices that make it impossible for schools to meet the learning needs of children
- Constant change in governance models
- Constant change in curriculum
- Poor (or no) use of assessment data and information
- Difficult to use assessment results and reports
- Policy initiatives driven by theory rather than practice
- Poorly understood curriculum development and implementation process
- Absence of systematic ongoing teacher evaluation and professional growth planning
- Lack of flexibility for schools and districts—real and perceived
- Focus on retention rather than education and on certification rather than on qualification
- Mismanagement of inclusion of special needs children
- Mismanagement of the French Immersion program
- High schools still reeling from the Foundation Years, unable to offer students the course selection that students need and want.
- Devotion to heterogeneous grouping at the expense of children's learning and reasonable teaching conditions

These are interconnected complex issues. Resolution will require commitment, courage, good will, careful planning, cooperation and **time.**

Recommendations to the Minister

I. Develop A Culture of Learning & Achievement

II. Communicate Effectively & Involve the Community

III. Plan for Change & Stabilize the System

IV. Develop an Accountable Education System

V. Address Structural & Systemic Problems Over time

Schools Teach—Parents & Communities Support—Children Learn—Everyone Benefits

Recommendations to The Minister

I. Develop a Culture of Learning & Achievement

Students learn & achieve

Change the language and practice of the system to.

- focus everything on students' learning and achievement
- make schools and districts responsible for learning and achievement
- support a culture of learning and achievement

The system is accountable & transparent

Assess and monitor to ensure that high quality learning is happening.

- Report publicly on progress.
- Hold all people accountable for high quality student learning and achievement—parents, students, teachers, school officials, and the ministry

II. Communicate Effectively and Involve the Community

Communication is effective

Develop province-wide communication plan for education. Make education the explicit responsibility of New Brunswickers—

Everyone is responsible

Establish partnerships with parents and the community so students learn and achieve

Emphasize the importance of education with all sectors—business, labour, schools, school districts, district education committees, parents, parent school support committees, government, post-secondary education.

Focus on reading and writing

Communicate so people understand everyone benefits from a well-educated populace.

Parents understand their role in learning & achievement

Develop a province-wide communication plan for parents—partners in children's education.

Parents are essential partners with the school in their children's education, and **in the education of all children. Plan developers consult** with teachers, parents and officials from districts and the ministry.

The Message: Schools Teach---Parents and communities Support---Children Learn---Everyone benefits.

School districts work with teachers and parents to

- develop specific, non-threatening, fun-to-do activities for **parents in support of** their children's **learning**
- have an evaluation plan to see what works over time.

Learning-support activities for parents and children are simple, explicit, manageable, non-threatening, and pleasant. Do not make parents the homework police!

Focus on reading and writing.

Evaluate. Keep the programs that work.

Showcase and celebrate the best of these activities in province-wide communication.

Communicate well. Encourage diversity. Celebrate success. Have fun!

Encourage each school to provide parents with specific "this is what we expect you to do with your child this week/month" activities appropriate for that school and its children. Do not have a one-size-fits all model.

There is a Provincial Protocol for Response to Parents' Concerns

In a culture of learning and achievement, parents and schools are a community working to enable children's learning.

Develop a protocol for response to parents that reflects the shared responsibility and commitment of parents and schools to support children's learning and achievement.

Parental involvement in a learning culture is about **educating all children well** not about individuals demanding what they perceive to be their rights.

Parents are the only advocates for their children. They must be confident their voices will be honoured and responded to. Address this complex issue by

- communicating effectively with parents, the public, and schools about roles and responsibilities
- working with the school districts, District Education Committees, Parent School Support Committees, and members of the public to **establish a provincial protocol for responding to parental and public concern, and for dispute resolution**

Ensure, through the protocol that

- legitimate educational concerns are addressed consistently, fairly, appropriately, and in a timely fashion
- entitlement concerns are not allowed to interfere with schools doing their work
- all concerns are treated with the same degree of professional attention, fairness and timely response.

Most districts have practice and policy that can provide the foundation for this work.

Provide adequate time for development, piloting, revising and implementing the protocol.

Ensure everyone is confident the protocol will be effective, and all key voices have been heard.

Communication is open, honest & transparent

Discuss the education system openly and honestly with the public. Emphasize reading and writing.

Ensure a sense of safety for all to express ideas in the context of community involvement in a culture of learning and achievement.

Communicate regularly to the community

- **progress** towards established learning culture goals
- **emerging issues**

Celebrate innovations and achievements, however small.

Mobilize the community to solve problems when difficulties arise.

Communication is open. It is not now.

Schools Teach—Parents &Communities Support—Children Learn—Everyone Benefits

III. Plan for Change & Stabilize the System

Planning is Coherent

Plan coherently. The government's *Prosperity Plan* includes a *Quality Learning Agenda*. Fit all education planning and action into the overall provincial plan. Concentrate on reading, writing and math.

Planning is strategic

Develop a long-term strategic plan for education that emphasises students' learning and achievement and that is articulated with the provincial strategic plan.

Ensure that there is procedure for vetting proposed changes to the education system against the principles of the strategic plan, the department mission and vision.

Ensure that all initiatives enhance learning and achievement for all students.

Curriculum Change Is rationalized

Declare a moratorium on all curriculum change for four years. Let the schools catch their breath and do their work.

Focus the work of the curriculum branch on collaborating with the assessment branch and with teachers to develop clearly expressed, illustrated standards. Start with K-2 reading, writing and math.

Curriculum change follows protocol

Work with the teachers, schools and districts to **develop an agreed-upon protocol for**

- initiating curriculum change
- developing new programs and revising existing ones
- piloting proposed programs
- using pilot data and feedback to revise proposed programs
- establishing standards, planning for, and implementing assessment
- implementing and resourcing new curricula

Publicize the protocol.

Plan curriculum change

Develop a strategic plan for the next ten years of curriculum development needs by consulting with teachers, schools, districts and communities.

Research is practical

Ensure that all proposed curriculum is tested in schools from a practical perspective. Research-based ideas must be

- practical for the schools to use
- effective in moving the system to the goal of improved learning for all students.

Ensure that school based people have extensive input to development.

Be committed to revise based on advice from the field.

Governance of the system is stable & evaluated

Leave the current governance model in place for a minimum of four years.

Plan for evaluation of the model at end of year two and again at end of year three.

Work with the public, teachers and schools to develop criteria for evaluation of the governance structure.

Evaluate in terms of how well the model supports enhanced learning and achievement for all students. Make the necessary fine-tuning changes.

Report to the public.

A climate of trust prevails

Effective systems are those in which voices of dissent have an honoured place. The current climate in New Brunswick's education system is one of mistrust, and repression. This must change if any progress is to be made.

Management is strategic

Coupled with the closed mistrustful climate is a tradition of micromanagement.

The ministry sets enabling policy and defines standards.

The districts manage their systems in the most effective ways possible to ensure maximum learning and achievement for all students.

Ensure that everything enhances all students' learning and achievement.

Evaluate all decisions against this goal.

IV. Develop an Accountable Education System

Standards are defined

Set standards for

- **Curriculum Content**
  - What do you expect students to be able to do, understand, in what context, and by what point in their schooling?

- **Assessment**
  - How will you find out if your expectations are met?
  - What does acceptable and excellent student work look like?
  - How can you find out—-What kinds of questions, and tasks will show you how well students can do what is expected?
  - What criteria will you use for scoring? How do the criteria and tests fit with the curriculum standards?

- **Achievement**
  - Report assessment results against an agreed-upon desired achievement standard.
  - Have the same achievement standard for all assessments. For example, 80% of students will achieve the acceptable level or pass on a given assessment; 10% will have scores at a defined level of excellence e.g. above 80%.
  - Consult with teachers and the public about what the external standard for achievement should be.

Revised Assessment Results Reports are useful

Redesign the Annual Reports of provincial assessment
The redesigned reports

- are easy to read
- report data in forms other than as averages or means
- report distributions of scores
- report parallel data over-time
- report results publicly to the district and the province
- report against the agreed-upon achievement standards
- districts share reports with all members of school staffs and the community

Align reports so that data is reported consistently for all assessments.

Discuss results of assessments in only terms of

- school or district compared to the province
- school or district to its own past performance

Never compare one school to another.

Use Assessment results

Use assessment data in school improvement planning

Work with schools and districts so that teachers and administrators gain confidence in using assessment data wisely to improve delivery of curriculum and to enhance students' learning and achievement.

Require districts to have goals for improved student achievement as part of school improvement planning.

Educators are assessment literate

Develop assessment literacy in all staff members. All professional staff members know how

- to interpret large-scale assessment results in context of curriculum standards
- classroom assessment differs from large scale assessment and the limitations of each
- to communicate with parents and the public about assessment data
- to plan professional development to **improve students' learning using assessment data**
- to plan for the learning needs of the children in their school and/district

Champion diverse plans for improving student achievement. Avoid one-size-fits-all. Celebrate success.

Revitalize the assessment program

Consult with the schools and districts to develop a three-year plan for addressing gaps and issues in the assessment program. These changes will come with some costs. Schools will need lead time to prepare students and teachers. Planning to implement assessment changes is essential.

- **Change the administration months for exams and assessments.** Move them all to late spring (April to June) and the end of term (January or June).

If assessments are reflections of what you expect students to learn, they must happen late in the school year so that students are working toward the assessment.

Administration Middle Level Language

Move *Middle Level Language* to near the end of the Grade 8. Of greatest urgency is the administration time for the *Middle Level Language Proficiency Assessment*. This assessment, currently administered in late September of grade 8. Students at the beginning of grade 8 are really grade 7's. It seems unwise to base the graduation standard on the work that grade 7's can do. The Middle Level Math assessment should also be later in the year.

Results are available to the middle school for use on an optional basis at year end. Results are available to the high school in September.

This change will have costs attached since there is not currently enough staff in the Assessment Branch to handle several end-of-year assessments.

Valued Assessment

The Middle Level Language Proficiency Assessment is the most valued by the schools and teachers. The results from this assessment have potential to be used well and wisely for improving learning. This is not possible with the current administration model.

Assessment for French

- **Enhance assessment and reporting for French.**

Assess French Immersion reading and writing by grade 3. Assess oral proficiency for Immersion and CORE French before grade 7.

Grade 3 Reading

- **Assess Early Immersion reading at the end of grade 3 so that students' reading problems are identified.**
- **Provide appropriate reading support for students who are having difficulty.**

Such support is typically be in **French** not English. This will likely require considerable re-training for early immersion teachers.

Grade 6 Reading and Writing

- **Continue** with assessing Reading and Writing for Immersion students end of Grade 6.
- **Report** as with all other assessments.
- **Hold districts accountable** for results.
- **Insist on program improvements** based on results.

French Oral Proficiency Assessment

- **Move the French oral proficiency assessments to end of Grade 9 or earlier.**

Monitor French Language programs. How well are children learning in all subjects? Focus on reading, writing and math in K-3.

You do not have reliable data about the successfulness of mandated language programs. How well are the French language programs serving children's learning needs?

Until you can answer this question with reliable data no one can make informed decisions about what the problems or solutions are. This is not licence for inaction, but direction for planned investigation.

Since Policy 309 mandates French language programs, they must be carefully monitored for effectiveness. If they are found to be less effective than desired, then improvements must be made.

PISA data and the grade 11 Provincial Examinations show that New Brunswick's intensive French language programs are not having the benefits they should have particularly for the top students. This situation demands strong, reliable current data and constant monitoring, so that improvements can be made.

IV. Address Structural & Systemic Problems With a Long-term Plan

The New Brunswick education system has several complex problems that contribute directly to its overall poor performance.

- Graduation and high school credentials
- High schools still suffering from the Foundation Years Program
- A miss-managed system for inclusion of special needs children despite standard legislation
- A badly managed French Immersion program.

Each of these issues is well known to most New Brunswickers. Until now, there has been little collective will to resolve any of the issues in the interest of students' learning.

Divisiveness

Previously proposed solutions have typically represented one interest or another. They have been based on personal experience, and on personal commitment to one model or another. They have fuelled the divisiveness of situation to such an extent that few will now speak candidly about the issues or about appropriate solutions. Those who venture solutions, do so with personal and anecdotal information rather than with information about the whole system.

Effect on Students

Meanwhile, **New Brunswick students are the victims.**

None of these issues will be simply or quickly resolved.

Each deserves careful and objective consideration.

Incremental Change long-term commitment

Change will take time and should be incremental with opportunity for adjustment when original ideas don't work as well as hoped. Change must also be flexible so that local needs and issues are accommodated. **The inclination to adopt a one-size-fits all model must be strongly resisted.**

Solutions will require considerable good will, setting aside of previously held positions, and creative thinking on the part of all citizens.

Solutions will require vision, careful planning, careful implementation, readiness to modify, patience and time. Solutions must be evaluated in the context of the **greatest educational gains for all New Brunswick students.**

Failure to address these problems will leave New Brunswick with even worse performance on external indicators than is now the case.

Graduation and High School Credentials

You have to fix this problem or accept that performance will stay as it is—far below national standards and far below other provinces. In fact it will continue to decline.

Establish credentials with meaning. Right now, everyone graduates but with nothing of substance.

Universities acknowledge that New Brunswick students are NOT prepared for university. University of New Brunswick provides courses to compensate for lack of preparedness. The grade 11 Math and English Provincial Exam data confirm that students are ill prepared.

Graduation and low standards

New Brunswick must re-think its tradition of tying the grade 12-graduation ceremony to high school grades and the grade 8 assessments. This is a major contributor to low standards.

When everyone has to graduate, and differentiated programming and diplomas are not acceptable, the only option is low standards.

It is feasible to have the same formal graduation ceremony that everyone values so highly, and tie participation to mid-term performance in the grade 12 courses students are taking.

Action

Immediately establish a committee of high school teachers and administrators to prepare a discussion paper of preferred options to the graduation problem.

Present the paper for public consultation within the year.

Plan to have an agreed upon solution that the schools, parents, students, the post-secondary institutions support. Set a target date. Don't let any students be negatively impacted by the change when it is implemented.

Goals

- Retain the important social and coming-of-age function of the graduation event.
- Retain some course completion requirements for participation in the event (these should probably be school specific!)
- Separate high school credentials from graduation ceremonies
- Ensure that high school credentials mean something
- Separate learning from social activity.
- Re-think the grade 11 provincial examinations.

High School Structure and Programming

High Schools are still recovering from the problems created by the poorly implemented foundation years program. This coupled with the results of badly managed inclusion and French Immersion programs in elementary and middle schools, the requirement that everyone graduate, and the inflexible grade 9 – 10 program leave the high schools struggling to manage and unable to meet students' learning needs despite dedicated and professional administrators and teachers.

There are no provincially-agreed-upon standards for students' learning in any of the high school subjects. Grade inflation is flagrant because students are expected to go to university or at least graduate. Teachers are often teaching courses for which they are not qualified.

Provincial assessment data show high schools are not preparing students in mathematics and English. The University of New Brunswick confirms this. District people claim that non-post-secondary bound students are not well prepared for work. The general absence of strong apprenticeship, community partnerships and work experience programs support this claim.

Administrators and teachers in high schools are the people with the solutions to these problems.

Short-Term Action

The best short-term solution is to insist that the high schools improve their provincial assessment results, and give them the freedom to staff and structure their own schools to meet students' learning needs.

Long-Term Action

Develop a long-term plan with a working group of high school administrators and teachers, parents, labour, business, trades, the post-secondary sector, NBTA and the ministry. Consider arranging a summer planning session of one or two weeks.

School Diversity

Free individual schools to program and differentiate to meet the complex needs of their own students. Schools must be free to address students' learning problems as early and aggressively as possible. They must **challenge the best students**.

It is unacceptable to confuse the goal of students' learning with heterogeneous grouping and particular educational philosophies. Various kinds of grouping support various kinds of learning for different students. One size does not fit all.
Recommendations:

- Demand more substance of high school students.
- Provide program differentiation in grade 10
- Address learning problems early
- Encourage locally developed work-experience and community partnership programs for at risk students
- Showcase successes
- Move provincial examinations to grade 12

Core French, French Immersion, Inclusion of Special Students

There is no one who is not well aware that New Brunswick's education system has serious issues in these complex and volitle areas.

In my view, the problems come from mis-management of inclusionary education, a commitment to heterogeneous grouping regardless of learning consequence, and a poorly monitored and managed immersion program. The result is abandonment of children's educations for the best of intention.

The attendant problems will take wisdom, vision, courage, and time to resolve. There are no simple solutions.

However, there are some small shifts in focus that might improve the situation for children.

Inclusion

Acknowledge there are problems with inclusion in all parts of the system, but that the problems are acute at K-5 and in the Core-French program.

Learning

Work with the districts parents and schools to describe the actual problems in terms of learning. **Find local solutions that emphasize learning for all children**.

Insist that the schools and districts take charge of children's learning in the best ways possible for the children in their care. Parents must be part of the solution.

Flexibility for learning

Demand flexible and creative approaches to helping all children learn. Focus all inclusionary practice on maximizing each child's learning. A heterogeneous setting is not always the best setting for all children.

Accountability

Require schools to program and structure for learning and insist on results. Concentrate on K to grade four.

Immersion teachers are part of the discussion and the solution.

There should be special needs children in Immersion. How many are there?

Look for successful projects. There are several schools where current programming addresses children's' learning needs. Showcase and celebrate these projects and schools.

Finance innovative micro projects. Give seed money to schools and districts for innovations centred on reading and learning of special needs children. Tie dollars to real results.

Guidelines

Evaluate the *1988 Working Guidelines for Integration* in the context of practicality. Insist the working group study and report on practice and policy of other jurisdictions. In some instances, the Working Guidelines demand much more of the schools than the legislation does.

Remind school districts of Bill 85. 42 (2.1) "A school board shall place exceptional pupils such that they receive special education programs . . . where exceptional pupils can participate with pupils who are not exceptional pupils . . . to the extent that it is considered practicable by the Board having due regard for the educational needs of all pupils."

Core-French

Provide more support for Core French. Someone will have to have the courage to acknowledge that the Core program has a disproportionate number of high needs, behaviour-disorder and at risk students.

Regardless of the demands from others, children who are in those programs must have your complete attention. They and their teachers need help now.

Reduce class sizes in Core programs K-2 wherever possible and as soon as possible.

Set clear expectations for reading and math by end of grade 2. Support schools as much as is humanly possible in a drive to have all kids reading by end of grade 2 or 3. Let the schools do this in the ways that will work best in their communities.

Work with elementary principals to find systematic ways to **enhance the reputation of the core French classes**.

French Immersion

Clarify then address the French Immersion problem. **The problem is not early or late immersion, nor is it immersion per se.** The problem is the real and perceived inequities within schools and within the school system for parents, children and teachers. These inequities must be acknowledged and addressed. **This will take time.**

Integration and co-operation

Celebrate and showcase examples of integration of key activities between immersion and core French programs. Use these examples do develop policy around integrating social and some learning activities between the programs. If you have to sacrifice some language acquisition time to do this, change policy 309 and do it. You can't afford such a divisive situation.

Do the same with staff cooperation —immersion teachers must be part of the solution to students learning. Right now in many schools they are islands unto themselves. Seek out examples of schools with strong staff cooperation. Use them as models for others. Orchestrate staff cooperation and participation for the good of students.

Strongly encourage immersion teachers to participate in the same inservice programs as their Core-French colleagues where this is not already happening.

Support all early immersion teachers to take at least one course in teaching reading and math. Work with the universities so that such courses are available for credit off campus at locations and times convenient to teachers.

Standards and Accountability

Focus the early immersion program on reading and math. Require program review and accountability of immersion teachers.

Immersion students should do well. Yet the provincial assessment results indicate that they are not doing as well as the demographic would suggest.

Set very high standards for immersion in all subjects and hold the teachers and schools accountable for the students' achievement.